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THE VIRGIN BIRTH

RICHARD·A·GRUTZMACHER

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R. J. COOKE, D. D.

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The Virgin Birth

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this series of booklets is to present in briefest form the best thought of some of the foremost teachers in European universities on such subjects, Religious and Theological, as are at this time of special interest to Christian believers. Such books, we think, are both useful and necessary. In these days of restless energy, of infinitely varied and ceaseless demands on body and mind, few people, comparatively, have either time or inclination for close and patient study of voluminous works defending the historic faith of the Church—works which, while they may be monuments of skill and of modern critical scholarship and amply refute the erroneous findings of rationalistic thought, are nevertheless too far removed by reason of their minutely critical character from the practical needs of all except experts in particular lines of scientific investigation. To the laity such works present no clean, clear-cut image. They cannot see the wood for the trees. Such handbooks as these, therefore, and by such eminent au-

thorities as we have selected, cannot be other than helpful to earnest Christian readers who are not insensible to the widespread influence of rationalistic literature which is now being popularized in this country through cheap translations of French and German originals.

The first numbers of this series include such subjects as The Virgin Birth, by Professor Grützmacher, of the University of Rostock; The Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels, by Professor Barth, of Bern; The Resurrection of Jesus, by Professor Riggenbach, of Basel; New Testament Parallels in Buddhistic Literature, by Professor von Hase, of Breslau; The Sinlessness of Jesus, by Professor Meyer, of Gottberg; The Miracles of Jesus, by Dr. Beth, of Berlin. These will be followed by The New Message in the Teaching of Jesus; Paul as a Theologian; Do We Need Christ in Our Communion with God?; Our Lord; The Peculiarity of the Religion of the Bible.

While it is not necessary for us to indorse every word and statement in the several books of this series, since some margin must be allowed for freedom of expression and

something left to the saving grace of common sense on the part of the reader, nevertheless these booklets will be found in harmony with evangelical belief, and will serve to show that scholarship of the highest grade is not wholly on the side of radicalism, as is often asserted, but that, on the contrary, the essential doctrines of the Christian faith still have in the foremost seats of learning faithful teachers and stalwart defenders.

The translation of the series has been made by the Rev. Bernhard Pick, Ph.D. A comparison of his work with the originals, some of which are extremely difficult to render into good idiomatic English, will show that he has faithfully rendered the thoughts of the writers. Here and there without taking any liberties with the argument of the author I have omitted some unnecessary matter and have appended such notes as were necessary to a clear understanding of the text, or such as may be found useful to any one desiring reference to English works on the same subject.

R. J. COOKE,
Book Editor.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

THERE is hardly any other question which is made so perplexing through partisan hatred and favor as that of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. On this account its discussion demands of both compiler and reader an unusual degree of balance and self-restraint. This is best attained by a keen working out of the subject and its separate treatment from each of the different points of view from which its consideration must take place. As in all elements of the Christian religion and religious preaching designated as "salvation-facts," so also in the virgin birth, distinction must be made between the historical fact and its religious meaning. On this account we first inquire into its historicity and then into its religious significance. The results are not altogether independent of each other. In keeping with the now generally accepted belief that parts of the life of Jesus and the history of primitive Christianity have only a religious standing and value provided they have an authentic historical basis, a positive

discussion of the second part can only be entered into under the supposition of positive results of the first.

Since the obtaining of historical knowledge is never entirely independent of the views, of the presuppositions, and the methods with which the inquirer enters upon his work, the acknowledgment of a miracle like that of the virgin birth as agreeing with the facts can only be expected provided one is personally and on principle convinced of the possibility of the miracle. It must be denied to an otherwise dogmatical attitude toward the miracle. The end which can be attained from historical considerations must in such case be measured essentially lower; the historicity, in the sense of historical reality, cannot be proved, but only a possibility. The acknowledgment of such a possibility, will, again, depend on two things: on the statement of the sources, and on its origin. In accordance with this we propound two questions:

I. Is the proof of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ possible historically (*a*) according to the statement of the sources, (*b*) according to its origin?

II. From what religious motives can the virgin birth be acknowledged as real?

I. (*a*) As immediate sources for all facts in the life of Jesus those writings have to be taken into account which are gathered together in the New Testament, and this in the form in which we now have them. We therefore consider in the first place what the New Testament says on the subject. Express mention is made of this only in the introductory chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the Gospel of Luke all ancient texts agree in their record of the virgin birth (chapter 1. 27, 35); the attempt of some scholars to eliminate these verses, of which we shall speak later on, has not the least support in any text. With Matthew it seems to be otherwise. It is true that in all texts, without an exception, Matthew records the birth of Jesus of a virgin (1. 18, seq.), but recently a strange reading of verse 16 has appeared. In a Syriac translation of the gospel found in a monastery on Mount Sinai some years ago, and designated as Syrus Sinaiticus, Matt. 1. 16, reads, in a literal translation, "Jacob begat Joseph, Joseph, to whom Mary the vir-

gin was betrothed, begat Jesus, who is called the Messiah." In the same sentence it is asserted that Jesus was begotten by Joseph and also allusion is made to his virgin birth, which the following verses attest in the same positive manner as the common text. The text of the Syrus Sinaiticus accordingly represents a mixed form, contradictory in itself, which cannot be original. How did it occur? We have no reason to suspect a later insertion—either of the natural generation in verse 16 or for the virgin birth here and in the following verses. There remains only one possibility: to explain the Syriac text, which is, after all, only a translation from its Greek original. From many old Latin as well as from another Syriac translation the existence of a Greek text in the following form necessarily suggested itself, which was found also as really existing: "And Jacob begat Joseph to whom betrothed Mary the virgin begat Jesus Christ (*Ιακὼβ δὲ ἐγέννησε τὸν Ιωσὴφ ᾧ μνηστευθεῖν Μαρία ἡ παρθένος ἐγέννησε Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν*, minuscle 346 in Gregory, Prolegomena, pp. 528, 1251). This text formed the basis of the translation of the Syrus Sinaiticus, whose peculiarity

consists in writing Joseph twice successively. Thus it came to pass that the second Joseph became a nominative out of an accusative and a subject of the begetting of Jesus. We have consequently a false double seeing and writing of the one word Joseph in the translation from the Greek into the Syriac; an exceedingly harmless but very frequent occurrence in the history of the text, which only a biased scientific semi-outline could present to the unknowing as if it were an old text of Matthew, which clearly attested the generation of Jesus through Joseph. Evidently we have an old Syriac translation which in one half verse makes Jesus the son of Joseph while in the other half the narrative presents the virgin birth. And this conflated form in verse 16 originated most probably through a vicious duplication of the word Joseph from a corresponding Greek text, actually extant, which, like all other Greek texts, has only the virgin birth.[1] So far as we can follow up the text of the first chapters of Matthew and Luke they record the virgin birth in the same form and in the same connection in

[1] See Gore on Subjects connected with the Incarnation. Appendix. Also the International Critical Commentary on Matthew, p. 6.

which they are still extant. And since the historical method by no means requires that both narratives be burdened with absurdities, and it is rather more probable that each has a sense and connection, it is well first of all to understand the conception which Matthew and Luke had of the virgin birth, without the least regard to the further question whether they thereby repeat actual history or only their own ideas and trains of thought. Matthew puts at the head a genealogy of Jesus, which he supplements with clear references to the following history and which is permeated by the entire tendency of his book. This shows his arrangement according to certain numbers; more clearly yet his beginning with Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people; the marking the height of the Israelitish history in the kingship of David as its decay in the exile—answering the Judeo-Christian apologetic character of his Gospel. He alludes to the special form of the birth of Jesus, and mentions four women who, notwithstanding religious and moral stain—Ruth a heathen, Tamar, Rahab, and the wife of Urias, adulteresses—are nevertheless found worthy by God to become

ancestresses of the Messiah. In an antitypical manner, and perhaps in a conscious opposition to the Jewish blasphemies of the illegitimate birth of Mary, the special part which the virgin mother plays at the birth of the Messiah is already pointed out in the genealogy. Yet the pedigree ends not with Mary, but with Joseph. In how far this pedigree of Joseph, according to the opinion of the evangelist, can be of importance for Mary and also for her own child, he indicates in an unmistaken name by calling Joseph the "husband" of Mary (verse 16), who, hesitating at first, took her as wife in marriage (verse 25).[1] As *wife* Mary, according to Jewish custom, shared in all the rights, as also in the tribality of her husband. Through her matrimonial connection with a descendant of David she became one belonging to the race of Joseph and thereby also of David. In consequence of this, according to Matthew, the child Jesus which she had borne appears also as a legitimate child of Joseph. Like Mary, the child too obtains a part in all the rights of his legiti-

[1] In a prophetic manner he is thus also designated in verse 19.

mate matrimonial father; above all in his race, into whose registry as a matter of course it could only be entered according to existing right. The miracle of the birth of Jesus consists, according to Matthew, in this: that Jesus as the legitimate son of Joseph is not at the same time also his natural child begotten by him in sexual intercourse with his wife. The beginning of Mary's pregnancy is transferred before the beginning of her marriage (verse 18), and every carnal communion in wedlock before the birth of the child Jesus is precluded (verse 25). The pregnancy of Mary and the generation of the child Jesus is derived "from the Holy Ghost" without giving to this notion within the history of the birth any dogmatical qualification or mythological setting. In like manner the characteristic of the child born of the Holy Ghost, by the virgin Mary, is confined to the explanation of his name, Jesus, as of one who "shall save his people from their sins" (verse 21). The virgin birth of this Saviour is looked upon as a necessary outcome of a prophetical word (Isa. 7. 14). This will be considered farther on. The second chapter contains no

contradiction to the narrative of the first, but also no new observations which were important for Matthew's conception of the virgin birth.

Luke presents the history of the birth of Jesus in a larger, world-historical and at the same time more intimate Jewish compass. He shows himself very conversant with the ideal of the Israelitish cult and piety, as his description of the parents and of the birth of John the Baptist proves. Mary is introduced by him as an espoused virgin (1. 27), and at the close of the verse she is once again called a virgin; indicating thereby the theme which rules the entire following narrative. The man to whom she is espoused is of the house of David (verse 27; comp. 2. 4), whereas nothing is said of Mary's origin, much less that she is of the house of David. The connection of the child born of Mary with David is founded rather, by the Gospel of Luke just as by that of Matthew, upon his relations to Joseph, the husband of Mary. Like the genealogy of Matthew, that exhibited by Luke in chapter 3 ends with Joseph, as whose son Jesus is indeed to be considered according to the current opinion

(verse 23); whereas Luke and his readers by the narratives of chapters 1 and 2 are differently informed, and know that he is indeed a legitimate but not a natural son of Joseph. The child Jesus is an heir to the throne of David his father (1. 32), because Joseph, by marrying the mother, has lawfully and rightly taken the place of a father and—this is a peculiar view of Luke—because Christ was besides born in Bethlehem, the city of David (chapter 2. 4, 11).

The virgin Mary is saluted by an angel, Gabriel: "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee" (1. 28). At this word "she was troubled, . . . and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." The angel said unto her: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God, and behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel: How shall this be,

seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1. 28-35). In this colloquy between the angel and Mary the second answer of Mary can elicit a reflection. She is only told that she shall conceive and bring forth. She is betrothed, and matrimony is impending, and yet motherhood seems to be to her something entirely remote. She even asserts that she knows nothing of a man, whereas she is acquainted with her betrothed. A little familiarity with the situation and a more accurate linguistic understanding of the text allows this difficulty to exist only for the superficial observer. The address of the angel and the reply of Mary followed each other in rapid succession. By reason of the appearance of the angel and of all his words from beginning to end Mary becomes afraid and astonished. She stands not—as many book-worms imagine the situation—like a probationer before an examiner, who coolly weighs, carefully examines her mem-

ory as to the past and future, and slowly gives her measured answers. She rather answers in quick, timid, embarrassed, impulsive manner. Now the angel had said to her that she shall conceive in the womb, and this with such certainty that she transfers this miracle to the immediate present hour,[1] where she is surrounded by miracles and in the presence of the messenger of the heavenly power. Her betrothed is absent; how soon the marriage was to be consummated we know not; it might have been soon but also at some distant period. In this her perplexity the exclamation is well intelligible, "How shall this be!" And the further addition rightly explained is also entirely appropriate. The Greek word *γιγνώσκειν*, like the corresponding Hebrew *yada,* may mean simply to know in the sense of acquaintance as well as to know in the sense of sexual intercourse. In the latter meaning it also oc-

[1]This is also the opinion of the narrator. For in the course of his further narrative we nowhere find an indication when the otherwise announced miracle could have taken place. Rather we see that after the annunciation of the angel Mary very soon, "in those days," leaves Nazareth (1. 39), visits her relative, Elizabeth, and is at once received by her with the words, "Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (1. 42-43.)

curs, that is, in the genealogy (Matt. 1. 25). This term is mostly used of man's behavior toward his wife, but there are instances in which it is applied to the wife. The word *yada* occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible with reference to the wife and three times it is translated by the Seventy—whose language, according to most recent researches, has influenced the usage of the New Testament by the word γιγνώσκειν (to know) used in Luke 1. 34, namely, Gen. 19. 5; Num. 31. 17; Judg. 11. 39.

According to this—and there is nothing which can be adduced against it—the exclamation of Mary obtains the following linguistically justified meaning which answers the entire situation as well as the connection: How is it possible that I should now conceive, having no intimate connection whatever with a man! This explanation still gains in certainty when one convinces himself of the inadmissibility and uselessness of other efforts to remove the difficulty in question. Of these we shall only mention one, which, though the most arbitrary, has nevertheless found favor with many expositors. One explains verses 34, 35, simply as a later in-

terpolation and addition, and thus removes the virgin birth from the angelic address. Aside from the consideration that the connection between verses 33 and 36 is by no means improved through this erasure, a fact to which a prominent scholar (Hilgenfeld) calls attention although he rejects the virgin birth, the unsuitableness of Mary's answer and the interruption of the connection become still more evident. A sensible interpolator—and the question can here only be of such a one—is the very man who, before and after doing his work of interpolation, once more very carefully examines the correction and smoothes the seams. The desire to erase verses 34 and 35 can only be understood from the tendency to remove *a tout prix* from the text of Luke the record of the virgin birth; that—again without any textual or contextual reason—one also undertakes to remove in chapters 1. 27, *πάρθενος*, virgin, and in 3. 23, *ὡς ἐνομίζετο*, "that shall be called," cannot surprise him who again and again observes how the Roman principle, to correct history by the dogma, unscrupulously guides many "virtually" Protestant works.

After the annunciation of the angel the narrative makes the pregnancy of Mary commence at once. For when she soon afterward visits Elizabeth the latter salutes her already as "mother of the Lord" (verse 43). Not long afterward the consummation of the marriage must have also taken place, for, chapter 2. 5, according to the best reading, Mary is called the wife of Joseph, whom he takes with him on his journey to Bethlehem. As the wife of the Davidic Joseph she brings forth the Messiah in the city of David. Since the narrator believed his readers capable of remembering at the reading of the second chapter the communications of the first, he does not refer again to the miraculous promises of the birth of Jesus. While Matthew had pointed out only the Holy Ghost as the author of the child Jesus, Luke explains this by the parallel phrase, "The Power of the Highest." The child accordingly does not owe his origin to a mundane but to a supramundane power, and this is then more accurately designated as the Spirit, who brings religio-ethical perfection.

Wherever in the fore-histories the ques-

tion is of the Spirit of God the power of God is meant, which gives man a religio-ethical perfection and qualifies him for a corresponding practical proof. It neither refers to the third trinitarian person nor to a physico-sensuous procreative power of the deity. The product of this divine effort in the virgin Mary is, according to that, characterized as something "holy," dedicated to God, religio-ethical, spotless and—Luke brings here a view which goes beyond Matthew—as Son of God. The peculiar generation establishes a peculiar relation between the child Jesus and God; as the son owes his entire existence to the father thus Jesus to God, and as the son has his essence from the father, thus Jesus has his holiness also from the holy God. The existence of Jesus and his religio-ethical perfection are most closely interlaced with his birth of the virgin and of the Holy Ghost. The like thought expresses with a special turn also the genealogy of Jesus in the form given by Luke (3. 23, seq.). It rises from the present and leads the ancestry of Jesus through Joseph not only to the ancestor of the Israelitic people, but up to the first man, in

order to qualify him as son of God. Jesus thereby appears as the Son of man, being for that very reason also the Son of God; yea, it suggests itself to assure an intended parallelism between the origin of Adam and Jesus. As this came directly from God, so also that as "the second Adam."

What the prologues of Matthew and Luke offer for the assumption of a virgin birth can be comprised in the following sentences: Jesus is the natural son of the virgin Mary, born of her in marriage with Joseph. Since Joseph was the matrimonial father of the child, and assumed all duties of a father toward him, the child actually and legally partook of the race of Joseph and—since it was Davidic—became himself one belonging to David, especially as he was born also in the city of David. The author of his natural life was God's creative power, his Spirit, the mediator of all religio-ethical perfection. On this account the child which by this power was called into existence bore the character of holiness in the sense of religio-ethical perfection, as well as that of divine sonship in parallel with the direct origin of the first man from God.

Before the origin of this statement of the sources is examined according to its literary side, as well as to content, the attitude of the other New Testament writings must be established, since it is important for the solution of the question. Beyond all controversy is the fact that neither a direct testimony nor a direct denial of the virgin birth is to be found in the other parts of the New Testament. We nowhere read, Jesus is born of a virgin; but neither do we read, Jesus is not born of a virgin, or, which is the same, Jesus is begotten by Joseph in a natural manner. The inquiry is on this account put upon an essentially unsafe ground, since it alone can decide whether indirect testimonies and allusions exist which presuppose a knowledge of the virgin birth, or whether opinions are expressed, opposed to this assumption, which could at least not have been expressed with such knowledge. Turning to the first task, all the passages treating of the Davidic sonship, the divine sonship of Christ, and designating him as holy, sinless, as the second Adam and Son of man, must be eliminated as inconclusive. For, though we also asserted that in the pro-

logue all these ideas stand in a certain connection with the virgin birth, the inverted inference is not admissible that, where they are applied, this peculiar form of Jesus's origin is presupposed. The point of controversy is rather to be left open. First of all the very New Testament declarations whether Christ, as son of David and son of God could not also have been acknowledged as holy and sinless without his virgin birth—yea, in contradiction to it.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke we find no passages which could be referred to. In Mark 6. 3, the people of Nazareth are surprised at the teaching of Jesus, recalling to their memory, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simeon?" Jesus is here only called the son of Mary. Why? Because Joseph was already dead, we are told; this may be possible, but we have no certain knowledge of it. Nevertheless we shall not adduce this passage as referring to the miraculous birth of Jesus. For the people will only express surprise that one who is of their kind, whose simple family relations they know, is such a powerful

preacher. Had they known his virgin birth there had been less cause for this surprise. The Gospel of John describes at the beginning Jesus's "eternal birth" and cares not for the earthly beginnings of his life; only one sentence seems to rest on the notion of the virgin birth. Of those who become members of the eternal Son of God it is said that they were not "born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the *will of man,* but of God" (1. 13). The spiritual birth is placed in opposition to the natural birth, which is a birth of blood and of the will of the flesh; but the addition "of the will of man" does not satisfactorily explain itself since the natural birth was already fully determined by the two preceding expressions. For that reason another line of thought commences at this passage. The birth of the Christian is made parallel to the birth of Jesus Christ; it stands not in opposition to it, like to the natural of man, but is similar to it, because this itself was already supernatural; came about without "the will of man." John alludes in this passage to the virgin birth of Jesus. This is the more plausible to every-

one who knows the other attitude of the Gospel of John toward gospel tradition. However it may be with the origin of the notion of the virgin birth, it existed at the time of the composition of the Gospel of John and was known to him. Those especially who place the time of the composition of the Gospel of John in the second century cannot possibly deny its acquaintance with the miraculous birth of Jesus, since Ignatius,[1] who wrote about this time, repeatedly attests it.[2]

It is otherwise with Paul. His epistles were written long before the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and even under the suppo-

[1]Thus he writes in his epistle to the Ephesians (19): "Hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing, and likewise the death of the Lord—Three mysteries to be cried aloud which were wrought in the silence of God." In this passage the virginity of Mary is as certain a point of doctrine to the writer as is the crucifixion. Again, in his letter to the Smyrnæans (1), he says that he is "firmly persuaded as touching our Lord that he is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by [the Divine] will and power, truly born of a virgin . . . truly nailed up for our sakes in the flesh."

[2]Another delineation in the Gospel of John may possibly be explained by the thought of the virgin birth. At the marriage in Cana, the *first* miracle which Jesus did, his mother betrays a very remarkable confidence in Jesus's miraculous power, to which she still clings after the refusal (2. 3, 5). Should this confidence be thought of as founded on the miracle which Mary herself experienced with reference to Jesus? It is by no means impossible.

sition of the historicity of the virgin birth it is not at all necessary that Paul should have been informed of it in the early period of his activity,[1] since his knowledge in general did not comprise the entire matter of the Gospels. In Gal. 4. 4, Paul says that in the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, "made of a woman, made under the law." By this Paul means to prove that Christ entered into the like situation as the men, especially the Jews, of his time in order to be of real service to them. He uses an indefinite mode of expression, more sketching than working out. This is seen already from his confining himself to two facts: he mentions a law in general, not specifically Mosaic; then he uses the term woman instead of mother or mentioning the name of the mother. The mentioning of the woman is obscure and this the more as the participle in question is not derived from γεννᾶν, = to bring forth, which indeed would have required the mention of the mother, but from γίγνεσθαι, = to become, originate, which can just as well be used of the father or of both parents. Now, since

[1]But see The Incarnation and Recent Criticism, chap. v, p. 114, Eaton & Mains, New York, for the opposite view.

in the preceding verses absolutely no motive is to be discovered for the exclusive mention of the female descent in characterizing his true humanity, it becomes probable, after all, that Paul knew of the special case about the birth of Jesus. That he does not express this more definitely is because he meant to give here only statements in general outlines which everyone familiar with the matter could at once fill out for himself, those with reference to the form of the law as well as those with reference to the birth. If one will not accept this interpretation, which of course is not more than a well-founded supposition, he must consider the choice of the term by Paul as purely accidental.

The supposed refutals of the virgin birth which one may find in definite statements of the people and apostolic men and in some events of the life of Jesus, and especially in the manifest behavior of his natural relatives may now be considered. Commencing with the latter, we find the particular proofs based on a peculiarly dogmatic view. The phenomenon obtrudes itself plainly especially in our case, that critics willing to be "liberal" and "modern" find themselves unconsciously in

the spell of very old and stupid orthodox formulations of the question which they only deny but do not affirm—an indeed not very spirited activity. One starts on the assumption that the knowledge of the virgin birth includes every other knowledge with reference to the person of Jesus—for example, his divine sonship—that it moreover makes everyone who has this knowledge infallible and holy and that it preserves one from all fluctuations of the religious life and false attitude toward Christ. One observes, for example, that the parents of Jesus, Mary before all, frequently marvel at Jesus, understand not his words, yea, throw obstacles in the way of his peculiar Messianic practical proof, and, with the help of presumed dogmatics, infers therefrom contradictions to the virgin birth. Even within the Lukanic prologue such a trait is recorded. The parents are displeased that the boy Jesus, when twelve years of age, remained alone at Jerusalem, and Mary—though in a very tender manner—reproaches him when he is found. Jesus answered: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" To which the account adds: "They under-

stood not the saying which he spake unto them" (Luke 2. 48-50). That Mary because of the miraculous birth should have resigned the education of the child Jesus, and refrained from reproof when she believed there was occasion for it, is certainly more than an absurd supposition. That the parents were amazed at the independence of the boy who till now, and again afterward, was subject to them (verse 51), and understood not the mysterious word is not surprising. No one will blame them for it especially since at present most interpreters, despite their knowledge of the virgin birth, understand it otherwise. Still less cause for surprise is afforded by the narrative, Mark 3. 21, 31-35, when one abandons the wooden dogmatics and psychology characterized above. Jesus had displayed a very exhausting activity among his people, with such a result that because of the multitude he could not so much as eat bread. His kinsmen, no doubt his mother and brothers, hear of it and go out to lay hold of him; "For they said, He is beside himself" (verse 21). When his mother and brethren came and sent a message to him—because of the

multitude they could not get inside—intimating the purpose of their coming to withdraw him from his work, Jesus answered: "Who is my mother, or my brethren?" And with a glance at those which sat about him: "Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother" (31-35). Mary experienced here, what John the Baptist and many thousand "orthodox" followers of Jesus experienced, that despite the knowledge of the miracle of his life she nevertheless cannot accommodate herself to all details of his work and is offended at him. Yes, one can say, just because she experienced a miracle in him she expected other miracles from him, and not a wearing in continual low service. Mary was mistaken, and took offense at the manner of Jesus, because of the very miracle of his birth. And Jesus himself, with the icy coolness which he observed toward all purely natural family relations as soon as they conflicted with his divine relations and Messianic calling, asserts that those only have a claim to the closest communion with him who do the will of God. Since the vir-

gin birth did in no wise hinder Mary at times not to do the will of God, his knowledge of that fact did also not hinder Jesus from hinting at it.

It is claimed that the baptism of Christ cannot be consistent with the virgin birth. In order to state a very substantial contradiction, a special text of the word which the Father addresses to the Son must indeed first be supposed with the close, "This day have I begotten thee," which, however, though suitable—besides being an Old Testament quotation, from Psalm 2—is after all to be understood figuratively and not literally. The baptism of John is said to describe in the oldest form how the birth of Jesus as the Son of God was thought of. True, it is undemonstrable that it once had this significance for Christendom, but otherwise its alleged duplication by the virgin birth and its combination with that in two Gospels is inconceivable. Having a sufficient proof of the divinity of Christ why did one seek for another?—and how was it conceivable that two men still made room for it in their Gospels after having already premised the virgin birth, which seemed to them more pertinent?

Should one say that the evangelists united with each other, the supposition lies near that on the whole the narratives belong together because they do not contradict themselves—which is true.

Each time the Spirit is connected with Jesus. At the birth he appears as the author of the entire existence of Jesus and as creator of his religio-ethical perfection; at the baptism he is given to him as the leading principle of his public activity, which now commences. The Spirit at baptism leads Jesus to the true conception of his Messianic activity and to the rejection of all wrong ways in it; this proves clearly the consequent history of the temptation. The difference is best explained by a glance at a kindred view by Paul. Paul knows a twofold mission of the Spirit and therefore also a twofold endowment of the Christian with it. At one time the Spirit is the creator of the new religio-ethical personality and again he is the principle, the power, qualifying the individual for special wondrous practical proofs. With the first the second is by no means yet given, whereas the second only takes place where the first exists. Thus there

is also a difference between the deduction of the personality of Christ from the case in the stories of the birth, and the foundation of his office upon the Spirit. This had indeed never fallen to his lot had that not already existed, so that the baptism with Spirit presupposes the birth by Spirit. Over him only who by birth was the Son of God the voice could be heard at the baptism, "Thou art my son"; to him only whose existence descended from the Holy Ghost could the Holy Ghost come in such form, as he came at the baptism for the Messiah's calling. It may be that, from this twofold matter of fact, no irrelevant difficulties may arise for the dogmatical total conception of the person of Christ; in the historical tradition of the evangelists and in history itself the virgin birth and John's baptism do not contradict each other.

Some statements conflicting with the virgin birth one notices in Luke's prologue itself. Joseph is called the father of Jesus (2. 33); mention is made of the parents of Jesus (2. 27, 41), and even of the days "of their purification" in the plural. According to the above expositions on the

view of the two fore-histories concerning the lawful paternity of Joseph, the entering of Joseph upon the full place of father and parent of the child Jesus something is said that is a matter of course. Exactly the same is the case with the opinion of the people, frequently recorded in the Gospels (John 1. 45; 6. 42; Luke 4. 22), that Jesus is the son of Joseph. The people could never have been of another opinion since it never could have occurred either to Jesus or to his relatives to deliver up this delicate secret to the masses, who were no less fond of ridicule then than today. Whoever imagines that the evangelists should every time have corrected the erroneousness of the popular view —at least perhaps in a small annotation— has no idea of the way the people are treated in the Gospels and also in other historical books. According to the evangelists the people, and partly also the disciples of Jesus, have mostly an erroneous opinion of him which is entirely superficial and does not penetrate the depths. The false opinion of the masses as to the natural origin of Jesus is in line with their misunderstandings of him in other particulars. And the conten-

tion that Jesus might best have won the people to himself by revealing to them his supernatural birth also misses the mark, since Jesus never produced, nor wished to produce, faith by his public miracles. This being the case, how could he expect an effect from a past miracle and one of such unique character?

Thus only two passages remain which seem to preclude the idea of the virgin birth. In Acts 2. 30, Peter quotes a word of David, from Psa. 132. 11, that God hath sworn with an oath to him that "of the fruit of his loins" one should sit on his throne—a promise which Peter sees fulfilled in Jesus. In the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans Paul characterizes Jesus as one who "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1. 3). From both passages the inference is made that Jesus, as to his human nature, must be begotten from the Davidic race by a Davidic descendant. And this conception would be, indeed, the natural one under the supposition that there existed no other tradition concerning the way by which Jesus belonged to the house of David. But we have such a tradition in Matthew

and Luke; and the question arises whether these declarations conflict with each other. He who is acquainted with the Greek and, moreover, with Scripture usage, will decide that they do not. In the quotation of Peter a citation is involved. The term "fruit of his loins" is not coined by any New Testament writer, but simply accepted; and it is in keeping with the peculiarity of the New Testament, to be observed in uncounted passages, to apply Old Testament phrases in circumstances where every expression, every figure, does not apply, and with such we are concerned here. Peter simply establishes the close connection between Christ and the house of David by an Old Testament figure, without thinking of its minute adjustment.

When Paul uses the term "seed," also in conformity with Old Testament usage, it requires only a look into the lexicon to ascertain that with him the thought of the man as the bearer of the seed has receded behind the general meaning "offspring." Paul therefore states that Christ in his human nature belongs to the posterity of David, without prejudicating, or asserting to a

"how" in the sense of the evangelists, because the question has never occurred to him.

Study of the New Testament shows that a direct and detailed attestation of the virgin birth is found only in the introductions of Matthew and Luke; that John, probably, and Paul, perhaps, allude to it, each in one passage. Facts and statements which preclude it are nowhere found in the New Testament, but two figures and formulas on the Davidic sonship, voiced in connection with the Old Testament, neither affirm it nor deny it. To infer anything from this for or against the historicity of the virgin birth is not possible from the standpoint of the historian. The frequently expressed opinion that a story plainly attested only in two passages of the New Testament, and nowhere else, is open to suspicion, if laid down as a rule would consistently entail consequences which no one is willing to take upon himself. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is recorded only twice in the Gospels, otherwise nowhere; the same is the case with the Lord's Prayer. The parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan we read in one

Gospel only. If one is not willing to assume, on the basis of these observations, the incredibility of all those narratives, let him also do it no more with the story of the virgin birth; the reproach of inconsiderate and illogical thinking were otherwise not to be avoided.

As little is it possible to deprive the sources of credibility on account of the differences existing. Luke and Matthew state, indeed, so many particulars concerning the birth of Jesus, and the first years of his life, that their combination in an harmonious whole is difficult, and, perhaps, in every detail impossible. The newer historical method advocates, however, the principle—Lessing was its inventor—that the trustworthiness of an historical fact increases with the number of independent accounts, varying in details which testify of it. Would Matthew and Luke harmonize completely as to details, in place of independent sources, we should have only one authority for the virgin birth which might excite the suspicion of having been artificially adjusted, or "worded." From the New Testament itself, therefore, from a purely historical stand-

point, a proof for or against the historicity of the virgin birth can in no direction be inferred. We only draw near the question by tracing in the sequel the origin of the New Testament ideas concerning the birth of Jesus.

(*b*) Inquiry into the origin of an account must be made as to its form and as to its contents. In our department it is always literary-historical as well as religious-historical. We inquire, in the first place, by whom the introductions of Matthew and Luke were composed and whether at some former time they occupied perhaps a different—possibly independent—literary position and were not always combined with the entire Gospel books. And we consider, in the second place, whence came the contents of these narratives—from the personal experiences of the authors or from certain historical tradition—from their imagination or from general religious convictions of Judaism and heathenism. Only from this twofold mode of consideration can certain results be expected. For showing that the introductions inseparably belong to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke does neither

prove the trustworthiness of their contents, nor, vice versa, does their origin from later or earlier literary creations prove them legendary. It is only after the origin-possibilities of their contents have also been considered that a true verdict can be given.

That chapters 1 and 2 belong to the Gospel of Matthew as we now have it cannot be doubted on account of the facts already indicated. In them, beginning with the genealogy, the tendency of the entire Gospel, as well as its linguistic character, express themselves so clearly that they must have originated with the Gospel in the present form. But since our Gospel of Matthew is said to be only the later Greek compilation of an Aramaically written proto-Matthew, it is possible that the introduction does not yet belong to it. But there is no certainty about this. The whole proto-Matthew is not the Aramaic primitive form of our Matthew—it is probably a fabrication which originated in the nineteenth century—not in the first—through the misunderstanding of an old patristic passage, and which has, therefore, been buried again at the beginning of the twentieth century even by the most ad-

vanced and learned scholars.[1] The detailed shaping of this proto-Matthew as a book containing only discourses has, first of all, no claim on historical existence, since we have no trace of such a book in the ancient church and her witnesses. So far as the Gospel of Matthew stands in the light of history, chapters 1 and 2 are connected with it.

The case, however, seems to have been different with Luke. About the middle of the second century, A. D., a certain Marcion is said to have had a Gospel similar to that of Luke, but without our opening chapters, and these might, therefore, be a later accretion to that Gospel of Marcion. But investigations acknowledged by all competent critics—even by the most determined opponents of the virgin birth—have shown that Marcion's Gospel was rather a mutilation of our present Gospel of Luke, which he treated as he did other New Testament writings, in order to make them accord with his doctrine.

No better is the case with a newly made

[1]See the third edition of Zahn's Introduction to the New Testament, just published.

discovery from which we learn that in the additions to the Armenian translation of a certain Ephraem Syrus, this reading is said to be found: "The Gospel of Luke begins with the baptism of Christ." Aside from the uncertain and late origin of this statement, aside also from its uncertain text, it will not at all separate the introduction from the Gospel of Luke, for to it an epilogue is appended in which it is expressly said that Luke begins the narrative of the life of Jesus—only in the sense of his public Messianic activity—with the baptism of John—"after he had first spoken of his incarnation, and of the kingdom which commenced with David, and of Abraham." This conception is the more safe since that Ephraem in his commentary, to which the alleged notice is appended, has himself interpreted the infancy histories.

It is plain that the Gospel of Luke always had the fore-histories, which must consequently be considered as the elements of two Gospel writings composed between A. D. 60 and A. D. 80. With this assertion the literary inquiry, however, is not yet completed. Luke in his preface expressly refers to other

compositions of the Gospel history known to him, and thus it is very well possible that he derived his fore-history, or prologue, from such a source. On account of the differences already noticed, which exist between Matthew and Luke, two or, more correctly, three things are impossible. Matthew can neither have derived from Luke, nor Luke from Matthew, nor can both have had a like common source as basis. The refusal of the first two follows so surely a careful reading of the respective narratives that they require no further consideration; on the other hand, the theory of a common source has found two peculiar developments during the last decade. One scholar endeavored to understand the narratives of Matthew and Luke as variations of an apocryphal, still extant, so-called Protevangelium of James. He rightly has been left alone with this opinion. Even the reader who is not at home in such inquiries can, by reading the different accounts in succession and placing them side by side, convince himself of the dependence of that Protevangelium of James on Matthew and Luke, for which, besides, different chronological reasons speak. But the other

effort also to restore an infancy-gospel composed in Hebrew, said to have originated very early, meets with insuperable difficulties. It is difficult to imagine how Matthew and Luke could have taken from this gospel selections which can only with the greatest difficulty be made into one picture. Matthew and Luke, each one of them, could therefore have had only one special source for their fore-histories. It is not necessary to assume such a one for Matthew; not even the genealogy is to be conceived of as having been derived by him from another author. It exhibited the characteristic tendency of his entire Gospel and was therefore compiled by him alone. All the more is this the case with the portions of the fore-history; for example, with their framing by prophetical proof. It must therefore be considered as an independent and original literary production of Matthew.

For the possibility of a separate source for Luke, besides the indication of his preface, is that the first chapters differ as to contents and style from the preface as well as from the remaining part of the Gospel, whereas this is composed in good Greek, and with a

certain Gentile-Christian tendency. The style of the fore-history is related to the Hebrew and reproduces in the most pertinent manner not only Judaico-Christian but Jewish views; the latter to such a degree that some of its constituent parts have been pointed out as of direct Jewish origin. It were indeed conceivable that Luke himself, for the time being purposely confined himself in language and view to the sphere of his historical narrative; but a number of observations speak, nevertheless, for the supposition that Luke incorporated here a written narrative of Jesus's infancy. To carry out this supposition in detail, and to fix the accuracy of the original source, the sober historian will deny himself, who finds it not truthful to give the semblance of historical realities to his scientific hypotheses. For the main question which interests us, as to the historical credibility of the fore-history, or prologue, the literary critical inquiry is in no wise yet decided. If one is a product of Matthew, and that of Luke is derived from an Aramaic source, the story of the virgin birth thus being told for the first time about the year 60, nothing is thereby decided either

for or against its legendary character. It needed only a generation after the death of Christ for the formation of such a legend concerning his birth and of a literary deposit, while, on the other hand, trustworthy witnesses as well could communicate and write down authentic information of his origin. It is necessary, therefore, that we find the roots from which the matter of our fore-histories could have grown.

The supposition that we might have to deal with intentionally fraudulent fictions or with fancies purely, emanating from the head of the narrators, is too decayed and antiquated to be considered. It were inexplicable how two men, acting independently, should be guilty of the same deception, or encourage the same freak. For an eventual formation of legend we must therefore seek for historical points of support which can only be found on Jewish or heathenish soil. They have been found in both with great certainty. To be sure, as faith in the infallibility of papal utterances receives a hard blow when two "infallibles" bluntly contradict and curse each other, so also belief in the "certain (!) results of science" vanishes

when one sees how its "master-spirits" confirm the most divided opposites by their scientific oaths. Yes, there is hardly a department that, equally with ours, can shake the naivest blind faith in the certainty of scientific results, on the supposition, to be sure, that one works through the entire extremely comprehensive literature, even to its details, and who extends his knowledge beyond his own party-lattice.

Some trace with the most powerful accent of conviction the legendary foundation of the virgin birth back to Jewish roots, for Matthew himself in a careless manner has disclosed to us how he came to suppose a virgin birth, namely, through prophecy. The prophetical word quoted by him (Isa. 7. 14) has produced the fulfillment; in it we have the source of the legend. This was formerly the opinion of Strauss and it is still that of Harnack.[1] The famous philosopher, Usener, on the other hand, asserts: "It meant to turn the natural events upside down, should one consider the prophetical word as the cause and starting point of the legend. It was, rather, the seal which

[1] See Essence of Christianity. Translated by Saunders.

was printed upon the ready matter."[1] Neither the primitive form of the prophetical word nor its conception in Judaism shows the author of the thought of a virgin birth. In the Hebrew stands a word which by no means means "virgin," but simply a "marriageable young woman"; in only one instance, to be sure, the most extended, that of the Seventy (note Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) is this Hebrew word translated "virgin." Notwithstanding we nowhere find this passage Messianically applied in Judaism, never is the hope expressed that the Messiah is to be born of a virgin. This is the more significant since the Messianic hopes are otherwise developed in the most detailed manner perhaps with reference to the Davidic sonship and the origin of the Messiah, and are well known to us.[2] And

[1] Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen, 1, 1889, p. 75.

[2] Comp. Baldensperger, die Messianisch-Apokalyptischen Hoffnungen des Judentums, 1893, and already Keim, Geschichte Jesu, p. 355, note 2. In the book of Enoch 65. 5, where the origin of the Messiah is spoken of from the maternal side, he is called once only "son of the woman." This clear designation as son of the virgin in the Testament of Joseph, chapter 19, belongs to the undoubtedly post-Christian insertions in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, which, though composed on the basis of Jewish copies, received their final wording, connected with considerable retouches and interpolations, only in Christian time.

not this alone; rather of "the thought of the generation of the Messiah by God in the virgin, or of a passing of the preëxistent through the Virgin Mary, something wholly foreign to Judaism, not the least indication is here found."[1] For Judaism influenced by Greek thought, as by Philo, friends of the Jewish exposition on the passage in question could therefore adhere only to the purely allegorico-spiritualistic designation of the ancestresses of Israel as virgins, in which Philo beholds the incarnation of virtues. From this position of Judaism those circles also among the later Jewish Christians who remained Jewish, the Ebonites, who were the strictest, could not accustom themselves to the notion of a virgin birth, but rejected it. In the second century after Christ the Jews were still opposing the Messianic interpretation of Isa. 7,[2] and asserted that the Christians mistranslated the passage. Matthew is therefore the first, and for a long time the only, author who understands Isa. 7 as a prophecy of the virgin birth. This under-

[1]Illmann in Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie, 1891, p. 243.

[2]Justin, Dialogue against Trypho, 71.

standing came to him only from his otherwise established faith in the virgin birth. Fulfillment only learned to find and understand prophecy—an observation whose truth may be observed in the New Testament, and most frequently in Matthew. This fact has induced a number of very learned and especially conscientious scholars to give up this interpretation from Judaism and has taught them to adopt another one essentially more unimpressive. In a certain smaller and secluded circle of Judaism, called the Ebonite, also Essenic—in the time of Jesus and before him—a certain predilection for ascetico-monkish ideals, and, therefore, also a certain opposition to marriage, had become predominant. Out of these dispositions the idea of a virgin birth is said to have developed itself. It is true that there is a long step between a dislike to marriage and sympathy with the virgin birth; but, aside from this, not a trace of dislike for such marriage is to be seen in the Gospel fore-history. The words "to beget" occur nowhere else so often as in this prologue. Think only of the genealogies. Mary's and Joseph's intercourse is only rejected till the birth of the

child Jesus; the relations of Zacharias and Elizabeth show no trace whatever of Ebonitism. In short, the explanation of the story of the virgin birth as a legend springing from Jewish roots has not the least historical support at the present stage of scientific inquiry.

The more the knowledge of this fact advanced the more energetically the effort has been renewed to discover in heathenism the sufficient motives for the idea of the virgin birth. To be sure, the question is here only of the repetition of observations which were made in the second century by the heathen on the one hand and ecclesiastical writers on the other, and which were again resumed in the eighteenth and almost completely in the first half of the nineteenth century. One can distinguish among those notions which were taken from Oriental and those from Occidental heathenism. Of the former we first consider Buddhism.[1] Since one part of this series, treating of the relation of Buddhism to Christianity, and containing all the necessary material, has already been pub-

[1] The analogies found in the Mahabharata have nothing to do with the virgin birth.

lished,[1] we can be brief. In a work composed many centuries after Buddha's death, treating of the beginnings of his life up to the preaching in Benares, Lalita-Vistara, we read also of the miraculous circumstances of the birth of Buddha. He appears as the son of a married queen—not of a virgin—who conceived him not through intercourse with her husband but through the entering "of a small white elephant into her side," or according to another tradition, through that of a ray of light. The affinity of this notion and that of the New Testament confines itself to the separation of the human father in the origin of Christ and that of Buddha. When the question is asked as to a common historical dependence of the mutual notions nothing can be decided thereon. For influence on the Judaico-Christian circles in the first and second third of the first post-Christian century not the shadow of a proof is offered. He who asserts it either knows not the circumstances or falsifies them. Besides, in our case it were not so easy to explain how a married queen became a be-

[1] See New Testament Parallels in Buddhistic Literature in this series.

trothed virgin and a small elephant the Spirit of God. The fact—to be explained later on—only remains that also in another religion, in the course of its history, the thought has been conceived that its founder originated miraculously.

According to Gunkel[1] Saoshyant, corresponding in Parseeism to the future Christ who is to appear at the end of the world, is "born of a virgin in a supernatural manner." In tracing the sources we find, indeed, something entirely different, an offensive narrative.[2]

From the cornucopia of the Babylonian religion, which in other directions has of late distributed so many gifts, our department has been presented with only one. King Sargon narrates of himself: "Sargon, the mighty king of Agade, am I. My mother was a Vestal (?), my father of low descent. . . . My Vestal-mother (?) conceived me, in secret she begat me."[3] In this pas-

[1] Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments, p. 65.

[2] Windischmann: Mittra abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, vol. I, No. 1 (1857), p. 80.

[3] Jeremias: das altes Testament in Lizt des Alten Orients, 1904, p. 255.

sage the word "enitu" translated "Vestal," immaculate temple virgin, is linguistically not yet satisfactorily explained.[1] Its objective application in some passages of the newly discovered Hammurabi code seems to speak for its meaning as "Vestal."[2] It is, however, entirely unimportant for the conception of our narrative, and for its understanding we will even suppose that King Sargon in the first instance calls his mother a temple virgin. But he also expressly states that he has a father and that his mother conceived him. Sargon, accordingly, does not call himself a son of a virgin, but at the most the son of a woman who was a temple virgin but afterward a wife. We have here a parallel to the birth of Romulus and Remus, who also descended from a vestal who is said to have had unlawful intercourse with the war god Mars. Only those readers can combine it with the narrative of Matthew and Luke who finished their reading at the first time of the Sargon discourse

[1]See Delitzsch, Assyrisches Handwörterbuch, 1896; Grossmann: Der Ursprung der Israelitsch-Judischen Eschatologie, 1905, p. 271, who renders the above translation only with a point of interrogation.

[2]Comp. Winckler: Die Gesetze Hammurabis, 1904, p. 30, note 1.

and did not continue reading. Babylon also only offers us the help[1] that the origin of prominent personalities was somehow conceived as unique; thus, for example, the kings—may be this was even "court style"—were readily made the sons of the mother of a god, which was thought of as everything else but original.

And this very same thought we also find in the Græco-Roman culture circle. Not only religious figures, but prominent men of history in general are conceived of as having originated in an especially wonderful manner. Usener[2] mentions a whole series of sons of gods; Pythagoras was considered a son of Apollo; Apollonius of Tyana, a son of Zeus; in like manner it is said that Plato's mother had not her son by her husband, but by Apollo. The like opinion was entertained of Alexander, whose mother is said to have

[1]Babylonian Astrology helps no further. For neither is the connection of the heavenly goddess with the zodiaic image of the virgin established, still less the transference of that notion of the heavenly goddess to the New Testament Mary, and least of all that Jesus Christ is born at the rising of the sign of the virgin. Jeremias, who inclines toward these directions, quotes as a proof citations from Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon, who lived more than a thousand years *after*, not before, Christ! (Babylonisches im Neuen Testament, 1905, p. 48).

[2]Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen, 1, p. 70, seq.

been visited by a god in the shape of a serpent; it is especially significant that the emperor Augustus was also made the son of Apollo.

On the basis of these and many other proofs Usener is well entitled to the assertion "that the belief in the love of gods for the daughters of men, and personal relation with them, was generally diffused in antiquity."[1] With these examples Usener connects also two others according to which certain men are said to have been born of a virgin. One refers to Simon the Magician, in the Clementine Recognitions, ii. c. 14; the other to a certain Terebinthos, mentioned in the Acta Archelai et Manctis, c. 52.[2] This juxtaposition is in so far very characteristic—Usener himself has unfortunately forgotten to call attention to it—since the notices of virgin sons belong to circles which were *influenced by Christianity* and to post-Christian writings. The Clementine Recognitions, like the Acta Archelai, were under the influence of the primitive Christian gos-

[1]Suetonius, Book xxxiv.

[2]Ibid., p. 74.

pel literature and also of the prologues of Matthew and Luke. They are therefore not their roots but their excrescences.

Although Græco-Roman heathenism informs us only of carnally procreated sons of gods, Usener asserts, nevertheless, "The notion that our Saviour was the Son of God, born of a *pure virgin,* was the unintentional (!), yea, physically necessary reflection of the divinity of Christ in the souls of converted Greeks."[1] In reality, the notion only existed in the Græco-Roman world that prominent men, closely connected with the deity, were begotten by it in a natural manner, and serious discussion must accordingly ask the question whether this view

[1] Suetonius, Book xxxiv, p. 75. Jeremias (Babylonisches im Neuen Testament, 1905, p. 47) asserts: "Demeter, the mother of Dionysius, is called in the Eleusinian mysteries . . . holy virgin," unfortunately, however, without any indication of the place, which would enable a control. The most comprehensive and newest article on Demeter, by Kern, in Pauly-Wissowa (Real-Encyclopædie der classischen alterhumswissenschafe, Tr.) knows nothing thereof. The title of a virgin is opposed in a most decided manner to the very nature of Demeter as the goddess of mothers and midwives. Still less is anything said of a virgin birth of Dionysius. It may be, as has been supposed by most competent authority, that in the expression mentioned above we have the record of a Christian church father, who carried his world of perception into that of the mysteries—for which we have repeated examples. That the . . . the virgin of the world, has nothing to do with our question, see Archiv für Religionsgeschichte, vol. 8 (1906), p. 356, seq.

can have historically suggested the notion of the virgin birth.

Exactly as with reference to Buddhism and the other Oriental religions, so it is here. Not the least proof has been given by what agencies, by aid of what bridges, heathenish mythology could have come into the secluded Jewish-Christian circles. That it existed not among the Jews has been shown above, from which the prologues of Matthew and Luke originate. The effort to derive essential moments of the Lukanic prologue—not, however, the virgin birth—from inscriptions by municipal authorities of cities like Priene and Halicarnassus in honor of Augustus,[1] besides causing hilarity, has already found a sufficiently crushing rebuff.[2] But it is by no means impossible that a man like Luke, in his travels in the Roman empire, became acquainted with the Græco-Roman belief in the sons of the gods. The decision can only depend upon the consideration whether the *inner* relationship of the mutual ideas is large enough to explain the

[1] Soltau, Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christ.

[2] See Nosgen, Zur Geburtsgeschichte Christi, in Studierstube, 1902, p. 168.

origin of the one from the other. To be sure, to discover at all a relationship between the history of the birth of Augustus and that of Jesus Christ requires, on the whole, a rich "religious-historical erudition," which the simple, unperverted reader hardly has at his command. He will—and rightly so—discover little more than abysmal differences. In heathenism he sees a drawing down of the deity into the rudest sensuality, its transformation into animals—particularly into a serpent, or as in Buddhism an elephant. The whole supernaturalness consists simply in this, that a so-called god performs a physical act in place of a man. On the other hand, the least trace of sentient ideas is wanting. God takes not the part of man, but that of the Creator. The very application of the spirit-idea in the manner in which it occurs in the birth stories, and as it is analogous to the Old Testament, renders wholly impossible the thought of the Deity as sensual progenitor of the child Jesus. The Hebrew word for spirit, "ruach," is feminine, and if Jesus should be thought of as standing in some natural relation to the Spirit, the Spirit could only appear as his mother. And this,

too, is not an empty supposition, but as distinguished from the many learned fancies, is to be supported by the declaration of an old source. In the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews, an apocryphal writing related to the Gospel of Matthew, the child Jesus calls the Holy Ghost his "mother."[1] Since the child Jesus, according to the prologues, is not regarded as the sensually begotten son of God, yea, since his conception in the circles of the two Gospels would have been conceived as the greatest degradation of God, and is precluded by their conception of the Holy Spirit, the biblical and heathenish narratives have not so much relationship with one another as the Buddhistic elephant and the Græco-Roman serpent. Common to both sides only is the opinion that a great, wondrous man, especially in the realm of religion, must also have a wondrous origin. The more frequently, however, a thought springs up independently, the greater the possibility that it expresses something necessary and real. As often as the hope of a new German

[1]For the passage see Pick, The Extra Canonical Life of Christ, New York, 1903, p. 270.

emperor and a new German empire was active, it was not fancy, but anticipation of something which had to come and which was come. While in many phenomena the looked-for emperor of the future did not at once appear, signs were erroneously interpreted, and eventually one came who was ruler in reality. When, therefore, in the history of religion and intellect the assertion of the miraculous origin of the great men was made again and again, it is by no means to be deduced from this fact in itself that we have to deal with something unreal in every case. Rather is the supposition just as valid that it is frequently realized.

More, indeed, than the concession of such a possibility cannot be obtained from the stand of the pure historian. For the acknowledgment of its realization, and that, indeed, in Jesus Christ and not in Buddha, Plato, or Augustus, presupposes a certain religious attitude which can only be mentioned and established in our second part.

For the present we have still the task to indicate briefly a more suitable origin of the New Testament sources on the virgin birth than we have thus far known. After all

other suppositions have failed for its elucidation it is scientifically admissible, and, indeed, imperative, to assume for once the reality of the virgin birth, and from this point study the New Testament record. The mystery of the virgin birth was revealed only to Joseph and Mary, and the aged priestly couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were probably also taken into confidence. The very nature of this miracle necessitated silence. The consequences of its communication would have caused, and afterward did cause, indeed, the Jewish blasphemies of Mary, who is said to have had illicit intercourse with a Roman soldier, Panthera; an imputation as empty as malicious, yet which has the semblance of credibility for Haeckel.[1] Elizabeth and Zacharias probably died soon, and Joseph also, and with them the secret was buried. For Mary the thought of the miracle receded, since during sixty years—aside from the behavior of the Boy in the temple, which she did not fully understand—she saw nothing wonderful in him. Neither did the work of Jesus answer to the picture which she made to herself of

[1] See Loof, Anti-Haeckel.

the deeds of this Son of her virginity. She rather took as much offense at his appearance as others; nor did Jesus encourage her, when she alluded to his wondrous character at the marriage feast in Cana, to communicate more particulars about him. Thus Mary kept silent also during the public ministry of Jesus, during which the people generally, and even the disciples of Jesus, knew of nothing extraordinary. When and where Jesus heard of his virgin birth we know not. That he made it not a part of his Messianic preaching everyone perceives who has even a slight knowledge of its principles. Jesus never came before men as the one he really was, but in personal intercourse under the influence of his preaching he led them gradually to the knowledge and confession of the truth of his nature. Jesus also never expected to produce faith in himself by his miracles, still less by communicating a miracle once wrought on him. And, if it shall be shown farther on that the belief in his preaching, in his deity, and his sinlessness presupposed belief in his virgin birth, it could not be proclaimed on a basis of development of revelation, when even those

presuppositions were only nascent. Jesus died. Under his cross Mary stood also. Jesus was raised. Now the multitude perceived in the living as in the historical Christ its Lord and God, to whom it prayed; the sinless One who redeemed it. The days of which Jesus himself had spoken now commenced, in which the Spirit reminded his own of all which stood in connection with him. To the first Jerusalem congregation Mary also belonged, and the position which she there occupied seems to have been a prominent one (Acts 1. 14). In a different sense from before she had now become "the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1. 38), because she submitted to the Lord Christ and in full religious faith became subject to him as to her God. With sanctified pride she remembered the relation she bore to the Christ; the aging woman feared no more the reproach of men, and the Spirit disclosed to her the deepest and true understanding of her experiences. Thus more than once she told of the infancy of Jesus. In the virgin birth her discourses had the firm center. These narratives went from mouth to mouth. Almost a generation later Matthew fixed

them in a form which harmonized with the setting and the whole aim of his Gospel. Before or at the same time, another Jewish-Christian believer, who especially felt at home in the birth-narrative, fixed the stories of Mary in a free form in the Aramaic language. This "flying leaf"—science likes to speak of such—among other things came also into the hand of Luke, who was eagerly looking around for sundry sources. He took it in hand and revised it and made it the introduction to his Gospel. And in all this the Spirit of God ruled, taking the human into the service for the attainment of his purposes and objects. As the entire historical life of Jesus became by no means the object of the apostolic-missionary preaching—we never read, for example, that the Sermon on the Mount or the parable of the prodigal son formed its contents, but mainly his cross and his resurrection—thus, also, not his virgin birth. In this manner we perfectly understand that we find at most only vague allusions to the virgin birth by Paul and in the other missionary-sermonic literature of the New Testament. But when, at the turn of the first to the second century, it was de-

termined to put together as a confession, those facts of the life of Jesus which had become of religious importance for the congregation, the virgin birth had been already received into the ancient apostolism. The certainty of its historicity and religious importance, of its harmony and connection with the facts of the life of Jesus, had been felt. This attempt to explain the New Testament statements of the virgin birth is, the propounded form, a suggestion, and pretends to be no more than such. It must be admitted that it claims to explain and combine somewhat more pertinently and more connectedly the well-established historical individual cognitions than the rejected known to be unhistorical. From the standpoint of the impartial historian it is consequently proven that the New Testament account of the virgin birth has historical reality as its basis.

II. Only the view of life, the faith of the individual man, can change this historical possibility of the virgin birth into a reality or unreality. Whoever acknowledges no God, or he who fails to make his nature coincide with that of the world or its inner-

most kernel, must, as a matter of course, on this basis refuse to assent to the virgin birth. Or, whoever believes his God capable of "spiritual" but not of "natural" miracles, and besides sees in the miraculous birth no meaning and value for the reception of salvation in the person of Christ, necessarily fails in the appreciation of the historical narrative. He must either be content with this lack of discernment or, with new courage search for stronger "natural" explanations and deductions. On the other hand, belief in God, and in him as the Lord who, for the sake of man's salvation, wonderfully masters the ways of history as well as of nature, together with the inner religious conviction that the virgin birth is necessary to the full understanding of the life of Jesus as Redeemer—this belief allows firm and sincere adoption of the virgin birth as a fact in salvation.

The right of belief in God, and of the conviction of the necessity of the miracle on account of sin and redemption, and its adjustment to the lawful order of creation, can neither be explained nor proven in this place. Only two things are possible to prove,

namely, how unfounded is the difference between natural and spiritual miracles, and what deep religious roots the affirmation of the virgin birth has. That keen separation of nature and spirit, body and soul, is the inheritance of a certain older one-sided conception of the world. The German idealistic philosophy had placed a wide chasm between natural and spiritual happenings; yea, it presented the latter as almost belonging to another world (so Kant). To it alone freedom and morality and—so far as it was considered necessary—religion also were to belong. But when, with the advancement of the natural sciences, the essence of nature and its worth were better understood, the materialistic world-conception arose again, which on its part depreciated with the spiritual life all domains like morality and religion. In the emergency produced thereby, a number of theologians went back again to the old idealism, above all things to Kant. They again bluntly separated the natural and the spiritual life from each other, and assured to religion and also to God, but only in the realm of the spiritual, a modest place. In the spiritual

and especially in the moral life he was allowed to perform a miracle. This whole world-picture is, however, outstripped in all departments by modern science. Psychology, sociology, history, especially also that of religion, show in like manner how nature, as the material and lawful, reaches into all provinces of the spiritual life and jointly rules their happenings. On the other hand, the belief becomes ever stronger that transcendental factors control the most elementary events of nature-happenings. If, therefore, the coincidence of nature and spirit-happening is indissoluble, the interworking of both has this effect for the modern man in his present world-picture, that he cannot debar from one of these domains his religion, his God. At present, therefore, for anyone who takes part in the scientific advances of our time, only the denial of every miracle or acceptance of nature and spirit-miracles is possible, since this distinction, in the sense of a contrariety excluding itself, is obsolete. If I am sincerely of the opinion that in the spiritual realm God is able to call forth plainly new things which are not themselves derived from the forces of the inner worldly

existence, and if the term "miracle" is not merely an idle phrase, I must extend this view also to nature, which is completely filled with the Spirit. Consequently, the connection with modern science allows us to assume a prodigy quite as well as a spiritual wonder when—this is here again the inevitable supposition—there is cause for it in religion.

Our last statements concern the discovery of the religious reasons which speak for a belief in the virgin birth. The Christian belief is founded on the person of Jesus Christ as its Lord and Redeemer. In that is contained the acknowledgment of his deity and sinlessness.[1] He who arrives not at both shows that he has not realized the religious experiences which, according to the history of primitive Christianity, specifically belong to it. He may, nevertheless, have religion; perhaps a better, higher, and more purified, but certainly not the Christian. Only those who experience Christ as the divine Lord and sinless Saviour are Christians, and have a right to speak when it concerns the re-

[1]For the connection of both, see Seeberg: Warum glauben wir an Christus, 2d ed.

ligious worth of a certain fact of the Christian religion. Competence in our department is also the supposition of judgment. Christ's divinity and sinlessness fill the whole being and full life of faith. Divinity or holiness adheres not merely to his words and thoughts, to his will and actions, but whatever appears or stands behind as the contents of his life and its expression, has part in both.[1] As little is a time in the life of Jesus consistent with the religious experience in which he was not yet God, or only a nascent saint, both rather existed in all phases of development in the forms answering the same. As sex and race, temperament and genius, never belong to only one part of the human personality, and come to it only during the duration of its later life, but are devised from the beginning in an all-comprehending sway, thus it is also with Christ's divinity and holiness. If both belong to him at all, they belong to him from the beginning, from his birth. The Christ of faith is from his birth divine and holy. Natural birth never produces anything holy

[1]These few suggestions must suffice since neither a total view of the person of Christ nor even of his deity can here be developed.

and divine, but human and sinful; consequently Jesus's origin must have been miraculous. This wonderfulness consists in this: in place of a child in whom a sinful man originates, a Child is created who becomes a holy and divine Redeemer. In the religious experience of the individual Christian, which he realizes in his Christ-God, this is immediately concluded. If the Christian were thrown upon his imagination, he could fancy different forms in which God had brought about this miracle. Even one's own child, of a human father and a human mother, could have been formed divine and sinless by God. This would have been a particularly great and incomprehensible miracle. Reverence prohibits the Christian to assert, even subsequently, with reference to any fact, that God *had* to consummate it exactly so; he never puts himself as counselor and judge above his God. Thus he does not assert that God could only have sent the holy and divine Redeemer by birth from a virgin, for the form of a virgin birth has not in itself sinlessness and holiness as necessary consequence. If the natural sexual procreation according to biblico-evangelical

ideas is not sinful, and if the sexual act itself by no means procreates the sin, sinlessness is not given with its omission. Rather is sin transferred by the association of the sexes, and had Mary also part in it as a parturient virgin, the child would have also become sinful without any specifically purifying operation on the part of God. Son of the virgin and Son of God do also not coincide necessarily. The virgin could have borne a singularly wondrous man, such for example, as the Koran thinks Jesus to have been—which makes him the son of the virgin but not of God. The Christian who does not dictate to his God and put God under the compulsion of his human logic and dogmatics, finds in the revealed history the knowledge of forms in which God has *actually* accomplished his miracles. If the Christian who, in his experience of his faith is certain of the miraculous origin of his divine Saviour, obtains from history the authentic proof that it was consummated in the form of the virgin birth, he thankfully accepts it, and surrounds it with his religious certainty. He rejoices that history confirms this and makes more real to him that

to which his inner life responds. He possesses the inner reasoning. We continually experience the saving power of the death of Jesus Christ, and see in history its peculiar form—that of the crucifixion; but the fuller form of his resurrection story makes known to us that he is with us as the living One. Thus our religious certainty of the miraculous birth of Jesus receives its historical form through the prologues of Matthew and Luke.

In our personal knowledge of Christ lies also the last reason for our belief that only in him, and not in other great men, the prevalent thought that they should originate in a miraculous manner, has been realized. Buddha and Plato, Alexander and Augustus, have not so inwardly influenced us that we say to them: "Ye are the sons and the saints of God"; and for this reason we also do not believe that their birth was accomplished by a wonderful creative act of God. In Christ, however, we can see the Son of the virgin, because he becomes to us God and Lord. Jesus's divinity and sinlessness are so closely woven together with the virgin birth, as concerning our religious life and also that of the

church, that they can no more be separated from one another. This shows how, on the one hand, the giving up of the virgin birth almost always leads to the giving up of the perfect divinity and sinlessness of Christ; and how, on the other hand, the Christian belief in both has always found a stronghold and a firm foundation in the miraculous origin of Christ. We can very clearly observe this as in Luther, whose religious life still recommends itself chiefly, as a rule, for evangelical religious works. In his sermons and hymns he continually concentrates and impregnates his belief in Christ and redemption through the glance at the manger and the Son of the virgin in it. If one, therefore, indicates the virgin birth as valueless for his religious life, we shall acknowledge, indeed, "the sincerity" but not the truth of his confession, and seek its cause in a still imperfect religio-ethical experience. Only with a certain maturity and a certain richness, in the experiences of the Christian life with the sinless and divine Lord is given the belief in the virgin birth. But whoever has it, or strives after it, and at the same time possesses the necessary in-

sight into the historical facts, can acknowledge the reality of the virgin birth of Jesus from fully sufficient religious motives, and will be supported by the results of unprejudiced science.[1]

[1]On this subject see in addition to The Incarnation and Recent Criticism, published by Eaton and Mains, New York; The Virgin Birth, by Professor Orr; The Birth and Infancy of Jesus, by Rev. Louis Matthew Sweet, M. A.

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